



State Representative **Geoff Simpson**



47th Legislative District

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Committees:

Transportation;
Technology, Telecommunications
and Energy;
Financial Institutions and Insurance

Dear neighbors,

Education is our top priority — the constitution says it's the "paramount duty of the state" — and nothing is more important to our future.

I'd like to talk to you about our schools:

- overcrowding and student achievement;
- ways to attract and keep the best teachers;
- reforms the Legislature has passed;
- cheap, effective ideas to improve our schools; and
- making college more affordable.

As the father of three young children, I'm very interested in the quality of our public schools. Every child in this state deserves a great education. Our children deserve the opportunity to earn a college degree.

I'd like to hear from you about our public schools and universities. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at my district office in Covington by mail, phone or e-mail.

Sincerely,

GEOFF SIMPSON

State Representative
D-Covington

2001 Education Report



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Overcrowding and achievement

Citizens passed I-728 (with 71 percent of the vote) to reduce overcrowding, improve teacher training and boost early-learning programs.

The Legislature supported the initiative with \$393 million in new funding for schools.

Each school district should get about \$190 per student in this school year, then \$220 per child in the 2002-03 term.

Top-notch teachers

Voters also approved I-732, which will help attract and keep the best teachers. There's a teacher shortage right now because of low pay and high numbers of retiring teachers. Other states are offering big signing bonuses for teachers.

I-732 requires the state to fund cost-of-living increases for public school teachers.

We need to do more. The quality of education in a classroom is directly related to the quality and skill of the teacher standing in front of the blackboard. Our children deserve the best and brightest teachers.

The teacher shortage is especially tough in King County, where home prices have skyrocketed. It's hard for teachers to find a home they can afford. A school district near Bellevue is talking about building homes for teachers.

One idea is to give teachers in high-priced areas a housing allowance.

The Legislature passed a bill to allow retired teachers back in the classroom without huge penalties to their pensions. This is smart — retired teachers are valuable veterans.

We need to do more to attract and keep the best teachers. Our children deserve it.



Cheap and effective ideas

9 to 5 instead of 7 to 3

Why does school start so early? Studies show that adjusting school schedules — nine to five instead of seven to three — boosts achievement and improves attendance.

A later schedule can also keep students from switching schools, reduce depression in students and lower crime.

That's because most juvenile mischief and crime happens between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. It's no coincidence that's the window between kids getting out of school and parents driving home from work.

A 9-to-5 schedule has worked in Minnesota and elsewhere because students are more awake, alert and ready to learn. That makes sense. If school starts at 7 a.m., a lot of kids got out of bed at 6 a.m. or earlier, and scientists say growing kids, especially teenagers, simply need more sleep than that. Some kids, especially in big rural school districts, spend an hour or more on the school bus.

Skeptics of this idea say if you start school later, kids will just stay up and watch Letterman. But the studies in Minnesota showed students went to bed at the same time, about 10:45 p.m.

Better student achievement and lower crime are two goals I think we all share. We should give this idea a good look.



2001 Education Report

Involve parents and the community

Programs to get parents and the community more involved in schools are cheap and effective.

Parents hold the key to a child's success. They can decide all the factors that education researchers say determine whether a student succeeds or fails:

- 1 The variety of books and reading material in the child's home;
- 2 How much television the child watched;
- 3 How often a student is absent from school;
- 4 The expectations set by parents; and
- 5 The number of upper-level classes a student takes.

We need to do a better job of getting parents and the community involved in schools. It's important to get businesses and organizations into schools because kids learn more when they see knowledge put to action, and when they have real-world mentors. Many students choose their careers after doing internships in high school or college.

It's very cheap to get parents and the community more involved in our schools. There's been legislation introduced in the House of Representatives to get this done. We should pass it into law next session.



College

Every high school student who studies hard and gets good grades should have the chance to earn a college degree, the surest ticket to the American Dream.

Middle class kids get hurt the most by the high price of tuition and all the Catch-22's in our financial aid system.

Promise Scholarships gives students a chance to prove themselves.

Right now, there's only enough money for Promise Scholarships for some students who get the best grades. And the Promise Scholarships aren't even law; some politicians have fought the program, which Gov. Locke and many lawmakers want to expand.

Georgia has the right idea: in that state, every high school student who earns good grades gets free tuition at a state college or university. As long as they study hard and keep their marks up in college, they can keep their scholarships going and graduate without being weighed down with tons of debt.

It used to be, college students could pay their way through school by working summers, or having a part-time job. Not anymore.

Too many kids drop out because they can't afford it, or they graduate by maxing out credit cards and getting tens of thousands in student loans.

Opportunity for all is a fundamental American value. And our businesses need highly educated workers.

A college education shouldn't be available only to the sons and daughters of the wealthy. We should pass Promise Scholarships into law and put enough money in the program to make it work.



Comments: _____

Cut and remove your comments and mail to:

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